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THE GULL

Golden Gate Audubon Society

Berkeley, California

Volume 75

Number 6

June 1993

ANNUAL MEETING 1993 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16

Last year our gathering was at Audubon Canyon Ranch. This year for our annual meeting we will return to picnic at The Meadows at Tilden Park in Berkeley. The time is 5 p.m. till after sunset.

Directions to the Meadows picnic area: enter Tilden Park at Wildcat Canyon, Grizzly Peak and Spruce entrance, turn into Canyon Drive (left from Spruce, right from Grizzly Peak) at that intersection. At the foot of Canyon Drive make a right turn past the pony ride and continue to a meadow on your left. Our signs will guide you.

The chapter will supply non-alcoholic beverages. We ask you to bring a dessert to share and your own dinner. To eliminate plastic, paper and styrofoam, please bring your own utensils, plates and cups. We will have charcoal grills hot and available. Please call (510) 843-2222 to let us know that you are coming.

And do come!

REALITY CHECK FOR ANCIENT FORESTS

Expert testimony at the April 2nd conference called by President Clinton to discuss the future of Pacific Northwest ancient forests conclusively demonstrates that the timber industry's vociferous arguments to continue logging not only defy environmental concern, they defy economic and social realities.

Only ten percent of the Pacific Northwest's ancient forests remain, and all of it is on public lands. Testimony at the conference made it clear that preservation of the remaining ancient forest ecosystem is an economic as well as an environmental necessity. Representatives of Northwest commercial and sport-fishing groups—which employ more workers than the timber industry—testified that 60,000 jobs related to salmon fishing are in jeopardy if logging of the ancient forests continues unabated. The logging erodes hillsides, causing siltation of salmon streams. Thus the issue is not jobs versus owls, so much as jobs versus jobs.

The timber industry complains about shortages of wood supplies. However, a year's supply of federal timber is currently under contract—and they still continue to export one-quarter of their own logs to Japan. The industry complains about rising lumber prices; yet, timber prices are as low today as they were in the 1970s.

(continued next page)



The timber industry has suffered, but not for the reasons it states. The majority of the losses have been due to automation of timber mills and of raw log exports which are not milled here, but sent directly to Japan and other Pacific Rim countries. Between 1979 and 1988, 195 mills closed, and over 25,000 jobs were lost, mostly due to these causes.

Our remaining public ancient forests are biological and wildlife treasures. We cannot permit their further destruction.

As a result of the conference, it is clear that our national campaign to save the ancient forests has now reached a critical point. The President charged his Cabinet to come up with a plan in sixty days. Your effort now to maintain the momentum of the conference is critical. Demand the permanent protection of ancient forests. You can do it by phone (202) 456-6224 or by letter addressed to the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20500.

—PETER A.A. BERLE

FIELD TRIP LEADERS

In order to have a full schedule of field trips, more leaders are needed. Just to maintain the status-quo—leaders are needed to replace those lost by attrition. But maintaining the status-quo is not enough. We'd like to increase the number of trips. (Also, we would prefer

not to have to lean so heavily on our present leaders—some of whom are generously offering their time for three or more trips per year.)

Many expert birders are field trip leaders, but many of our leaders were not experts when they led their first trip. Experience is the best teacher.

If you have a favorite place to bird, and would like to share it with others, pick a date to lead a trip (one or two months in advance so it can be announced in *The GULL*), and let us know about it. You'll find it a gratifying experience. If you don't want to jump in all at once, you can get your feet wet by having a friend co-lead, or by having a beginners' trip. Or if that's still too much, just call up to get your name on a list and say you're willing to lead a trip sometime somewhere, and we'll work out the details.

Call or write the GGAS office. We'd be happy to hear from you.

RUSS WILSON, Chmn.
Field Trips Committee

FIELD TRIPS CALENDAR

Friday—Sunday, June 4–6—Birding by Ear in Yosemite. Leader: Dave Cornman (510) 825-2106.

Wednesday, June 9—Mini-trip to Redwood Regional Park. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510) 351-9301, and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

For details on the above trips see *The GULL* for May.

Send address changes to office promptly; Post office does not forward *THE GULL*. Monthly meetings: second Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Joint membership — local and national \$30 per year (individual); \$38 (family); includes *AUDUBON* Magazine and *THE GULL*; to join, make checks payable to National Audubon Society and send to GGAS office to avoid delay in receiving *THE GULL*. Membership renewals should be sent directly to the National Audubon office. Subscriptions to *THE GULL* separately \$10 per year; single issues \$1. High school and college student membership \$20 per year. Senior citizen individual \$21, senior citizen family \$23. Associate Membership in Golden Gate Audubon Society, \$10 per year.

The Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. was established January 15, 1917,
and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948.

The *Gull* deadline is the first of the month for the following month, and July 15th for September issue.

Published each month except August by the Golden Gate Audubon Society, office address, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. Special third class postage paid in Oakland, CA.

(THE GULL -ISSN 0164-971X)

Saturday-Sunday, June 19-20—Yuba Pass and vicinity. On Saturday meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Yuba Pass summit parking area (Hwy. 49) 15 miles east of Sierra City. Take I-80 to Truckee, go north on Hwy. 89 to Sier-raville and take Hwy. 49 west to Yuba Summit. (Or take Hwy. 49 northeast from Auburn for a slower but more scenic route.) We will bird the mountain areas for summer residents including Dippers, flycatchers, warblers, and Calliope Hummingbirds.

On Sunday meet at 8:30 a.m. at the intersection of Hwy. 49 and 89 (by the sawmill) about one mile north of Sattley. We will caravan to Sierra Valley and look for many of the birds of the eastern Sierra, including White-faced Ibis, Sandhill Cranes, Sage Thrashers, and yellow-headed Blackbirds.

Camping is available at the following U.S. Forest Service campgrounds off Hwy 49: Wild Plum (elev. 3300 ft.) 2 mi. east of Sierra City, and Chapman Creek (elv. 5800 ft.) 8 mi. east of Sierra City. Lodging is available at Sierra City: Sierra Chalet (916-862-1110), Buttes Motel (916-862-1170), Herrington's Sierra Pines (916-862-1151), Basset Station Motel (916-862-1297), Sierra Buttes Inn Motel (916-862-1191), and Yuba River Inn (916-862-1122). Leader: Peter Allen (415) 892-8063. (✓)

Friday-Sunday, June 25-27—Lassen Volcanic National Park. Join the Murphy family on the annual GGAS family camping excursion to Lassen. In past years we have seen Willow, Hammond's, and Dusky Flycatchers, Black Swift, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Calliope Hummingbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker and most of the warblers and finches that breed in the mountains.

The more serious birders will meet at the Manzanita Lake Campgrounds store at 6:30 a.m. on Friday and again on Sunday. We will bird around the lake for 2-3 hours, return to camp for a quick breakfast, then rendezvous again at the store at 10:30 a.m. for another outing. The Friday outing will be a leisurely hike of about 3 miles on one of Lassen's beautiful trails. (We may climb as much as 700 ft.) Wear sturdy shoes and bring lunch and liquids. Suntan lotion, a hat, mosquito repellent and warm clothing may also be necessary.

Saturday is a special day for everyone. We will meet by the camp store at 7:30 a.m. and caravan north to Burney Falls, Fall River Valley and Baum Lake. Bring lunch and liquids. This all day excursion of about 100 miles will include a 2 or 3 hour swim at Lake Britton, while watching for Bald Eagles. (If you forget your swimsuit, the trails at Burney Park offer a wonderful diversion, and fishermen can try their luck in some of northern California's finest trout streams.)

Since this is a long and tiring day we suggest a get-together for dinner at a nearby restaurant instead of returning to the campstove. Stop by our campsite for further information. We will have a campfire every evening beginning at 8 p.m. Bring your own chair (and cup of wine if you choose). We will provide hot water for tea or coffee. Check the campground bulletin boards or the office at Hat Creek Resort for our poster, campsite number and any last minute changes in the schedule.

For the Sunday outing we will meet at 10:30 a.m. to drive through the park—making frequent stops for birding. We should reach the south entrance around 1 p.m., depending upon how long we play in the snow at the summit. For this final event, bring warm

gloves (and a plastic trash bag for a mini-toboggan.)

From the Bay Area drive north on I-5 to its junction with Hwy. 44 in Redding. Go east on Hwy. 44 to the northwest entrance of Lassen. Camping facilities are available at Manzanita Lake. Lodging is available about 15 miles north of the park at Hat Creek Resort, Old Station (916-335-7121). Other information can be obtained from the park headquarters, Mineral, CA 96063. Leaders: Dan and Joan Murphy (415) 564-0074). \$ (✓)

Saturday, July 3—Chimney Rock, Point Reyes National Seashore. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Point Reyes National Seashore Headquarters (one mile northwest of Olema). We will caravan to the coast to look for nesting Black Oystercatchers, Western Gulls, and other birds of the Drake's Bay region. Bring lunch, liquids, and a scope if you have one. Leader: Russ Wilson (510) 524-2399. (✓)

Plan Ahead:

Saturday–Sunday, July 31–Aug. 1—Yosemite Alpine Ecology. "Best wildflower show in the whole Sierra." That's what David Gaines used to say about the walk down Lundy Canyon from the crest of the Sierra near Yosemite National Park, and that is our destination on Saturday, July 31. This is an area that very few people ever see, and because of the popularity of the trip, it is by reservation only.

We will carpool to the trailhead on Saturday after leaving some cars at the end of the trail near Lundy Lake. Volunteers for this car shuttle will be greatly appreciated, since no one will want to walk back up the 3,000+ feet in elevation that we have just descended. Considering the hike will be mostly downhill for 5 to 6 miles, it is very important that all participants be in good physical shape and used to high eleva-

tion hiking, as the trail will be steep and somewhat difficult at times. At the end of the day you might find getting together for dinner in Lee Vining more appealing than returning to a campstove.

Sunday we will go to a different location, yet to be selected, and should be finished by 2:00–3:00 p.m. to allow for return to the Bay Area at a reasonable hour. Each day you should bring lunch, ample liquids, hat, water repellent jacket, sun lotion, mosquito repellent, and good walking shoes or boots with treaded soles (no smooth soled tennis shoes). The emphasis both days will be on general High Sierra ecology, not just birds.

County and Forest Service campgrounds are located between Tioga Pass and Lee Vining off Hwy. 120 (4 to 6 miles west of Hwy. 395), as well as Tuolumne Meadows Campground in Yosemite. Motels in Lee Vining include Best Western Lakeview Lodge (619/647-6543), Gateway Motel (619/647-6467), and Murphey's Motel (619/647-6316). For trip reservation and meeting details call—Leader: George Peyton (510/444-3131 weekdays). \$(✓)

Aug. 12–15—Backpacking to Snag Lake, Lassen Volcanic National Park. Leaders: David Rice and Robin Pulich.

(See July–Aug. *GULL* for details of above trip)

Trips marked with \$ go to parks and other sites that require an entrance fee.

Carpooling arrangements will be attempted for trips marked (✓).

Problems: If you need a ride or can take a passenger, or if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, call Russ Wilson, Field Trips Committee Chmn. (510) 524-2399.

—FIELD TRIPS COMMITTEE



SHORT NOTICE

The State of the Estuary Conference at the California Academy of Sciences happens Saturday June 5. See p. 100 for details.

THE AUDUBON BIRTHDAY CRUISE

A tremendous thank you to Ron Storro-Patterson and his boat *Delphinus* for providing 22 Audubon members with a memorable outing on the Oakland Estuary.

The weather was perfect. A pretty sunset, good food and drink and pleasant companionship all combined to provide our doughty sailors with a wonderfully good time.

Thanks, Ron, for donating this trip to Golden Gate Audubon in honor of John Audubon's Birthday.

If you are interested in an outing on Ron's boat, his number is (510) 524-7422.

COPIES OF *THE GULL* FOR MAY

Some members received *The GULL* for May in a version in which the pages were not in numeric order. If you keep *The GULL* for reference and would like a copy in the correct order, write or phone the office and we will send you one while our supply lasts. We apologize to all who were puzzled or inconvenienced by this inadvertance.

APRIL OBSERVATIONS

April doesn't seem to bring great numbers of vagrants to the Bay Area, but it does provide other pleasures for those who love birds: the return of migrant landbirds, brightly colored many of them and full of song—a chance to tune up the ears once again; and wave upon wave of northward-bound shorebirds, resplendently gaudy, shorebird style—the contrast between the drab, brown-gray winter Dunlin and the red-backed, black-bellied summer version is enough to cause palpitations amongst the faint-of-heart, particularly when the flocks swirl in from nowhere, set down on the mud-flats for a bite to eat and then swirl on north again. May brings rareties, but in the meantime, it's hard to let go of April.

The now-regular spring long-distance pelagic trips—those agonizing (but wonderful) ordeals by water that offer the possibility of great rareties to those willing to risk the probability of abject misery (these are not trips for lovers of firm ground)—are going again with one boat making it to deep water on the 25th and reporting back with twenty-eight Black-footed and two Laysan Albatross, five **Murphy's Petrels**, one **Cook's Petrel**, thirty-five Least Storm-petrels, and six Tufted Puffins (BHi). Along the San Mateo coast there were Pink-footed, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Red-necked and Red Phalaropes, Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers, Common Terns, Marbled Murrelets, and Cassin's and Rhinoceros Auklets seen from shore, mainly Pigeon Point (RSTh, PJM, AID, JsC). There were three Cassin's Auklet nesting burrows found on Año Nuevo Island, making it perhaps the southern-most nesting colony for this species (fide RSTh).

There have been up to two Little Blue Herons at Alviso (SRo, PJM) where the species has been thought to interbreed with Snowy Egrets in previous years. Despite the departure of most of our wintering ducks, Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, King Eider, Harlequin Duck and Oldsquaw continue to be reported (mob). At the end of the month there were still ten Lesser Golden Plovers at Point Reyes (all of the race *fulva*, soon officially to become "Pacific Golden Plover"), some in perfectly splendid breeding plumage (mob), with additional reports from Lodi (JMHu, DGY), Alviso (SRo) and Pigeon Point (RSTh). There were half a dozen reports of Solitary Sandpiper, both coastal and inland (DSg, RS, DFW, JM, BY, RSTh); Pectoral Sandpiper in Pescadero (DSg) and Sacramento Co. where there was also a Ruff (JMHu), with additional Ruffs reported from Alviso (SRo) and Kings Co. (SBT). A Glaucous Gull has been in Gualala all winter (ShH); a Black Tern was in Alviso on May 1 (TG).

The Northern Saw-whet Owl remained in the trees near the Point Reyes Lighthouse until the 6th (mob); on the 4th there was one at the Fish Docks, which, if it didn't move on, was probably breakfast for the resident Great Horned Owls who don't have much patience with smaller interlopers.

April means that there are days when there are tremendous movements of landbirds through the Bay Area and when conditions are good, the trees at places like Mount Diablo literally drip migrants. Black-chinned (SGL, MMR), Costa's (DSg, JSC, GFi), Calliope (DSa, JM, GFi) and Rufous Hummingbirds (JSC, JM), none of them in great numbers, were all passing through, as were Hammonds (mob), Dusky (MnS) and Gray Flycatchers

(GFi, MP, FGB); and Nashville (mob), Black-throated Gray (DSg, JsC), Hermit (LLu, DSa, JM), and MacGillivray's Warblers (mob). Less expected were a Cassin's Kingbird at Panoche Valley (DSg); Northern Parulas in Mono Co. (ES) and near Point Reyes Station (RS); two Palm Warblers in SF (JsC, MMC) and another at Point Reyes (RS, SBT); American Redstarts in SF (DSg) and Año Nuevo (GJS fide RSTh); a **Hooded Warbler** at Tilden Park on May 3 (BGi); and an Indigo Bunting in Novato (HK).

The sparrows included the normal spring cast of characters: Rufous-crowned, Chipping, Black-chinned, Vesper, Sage, and Grasshopper with a couple of remaining Swamp and White-throated thrown in for good measure. There was a **Common Grackle** (BS fide RSTh) in El Granada on March 30, an exceedingly uncommon bird in this area: coastal records in Northern California can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand; inland records are just as scarce. And rounding out the month were returning Hooded Orioles, heading for the fan palms they love so dearly; and a few Evening Grosbeaks on the Peninsula (PJM, SRo, RF).

OBSERVERS: Josiah Clark, J. Scott Cox, Al DiMartini, Leora R. Feeney, George Finger, Reid Freeman, Bill Gilbert, Steve Glover, Tom Graves, Shawn Hayes, Bob Hirt, Joan M. Humphrey, Harrison Karr, Mac McCormick, Peter J. Metropulos, Joe Morlan, Michael Perrone, Mike M. Rogers, Steve Rotterborn, Daan Sandee, Barry Sauppe, Dan Singer (DSg), Rich Stallcup, Gary J. Strachan, Emilie Strauss, Scott B. Terrill, Ronald S. Thorn, Dennis F. Wolff, David G. Yee, Bob Yutzy. Data thanks to Joe Morlan and the Northern California Rare Bird Alert. —ANN DEWART

TURN OUT TO HELP THE INITIATIVE CAMPAIGN

Beginning Memorial Day, May 31, a race will begin to see if we can get 650,000 signatures in four months to qualify a new **California Parks and Wildlife Bond Initiative** for the June 1994 election.

This initiative will provide the State with nearly \$2 billion for the acquisition of threatened wildlife habitat, for new parks and for trails.

One million dollars will go towards the restoration of 34 acres of wetlands in San Francisco at the Candlestick Point State Recreation Area.

The East Bay Regional Park District will receive nearly \$40 million to help it preserve more of our threatened East Bay wildlands.

For the Bay Area we will see nearly \$40 million allocated for the purchase of threatened wetlands.

Those of you who have followed our wetlands preservation struggles know that over 7,000 acres of seasonal wetlands in South San Francisco Bay alone are all faced with development proposals. The only way to save these lands from development is to acquire them.

The fate of the million shorebirds, the hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, the endangered Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse, the endangered California Least Tern, the threatened Snowy Plover and the endangered California Clapper Rail, the fate of all these creatures rests on our ability to acquire and restore these wetlands.

But State and Federal agencies have just about run out of acquisition money.

In 1988 CALPAW I (the first California Parks and Wildlife Initiative) was passed with a huge majority and it brought the State \$760 million dollars for land acquisition.

The purchase about a year ago of the threatened 480 acre Marathon Property, a seasonal wetland in Hayward, was made possible by the original CAPLAW Initiative as was the acquisition of many hundreds of acres of wetlands in the North Bay.

But that money is all but gone. And much remains to be preserved. With California's burgeoning population, the race is on between the saving of our State's wildlife resources or seeing them all disappear under the developer's backhoe.

We need volunteers to collect signatures on petitions. Initiative staffers will give you a 45-minute training session and then send you out to an area that is known to be filled with responsive citizens. You will not be sent out alone.

It's an undemanding effort. People will be pleasant and enthusiastic. This is a very popular cause. One or two weekend day's is all it takes.

Golden Gate Audubon is going to try to collect 5,000 signatures for this critical venture and we need you!

Please fill out the form and send it in or call our office, (510) 843-2222, and volunteer directly. We will let you know when the training class takes place (you will have a choice of times and days) and then when and where to collect signatures. Make it a picnic day and have a good time.

There is no other effort this year that will have such long-term benefits for our wildlife. Join us in the great petition signing adventure. We'll be out there with you. Thanks!

THE BOARD OF THE GOLDEN
GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

PART-TIME LEADERSHIP NEEDED

Come work on a political campaign! Golden Gate Audubon is urgently seeking one or two volunteers to help coordinate our San Francisco members working on the California Parks and Wildlife Initiative. The coordinator(s) will draw from a pool of eager, pre-trained volunteers to guide and deploy signature gathers in the city.

Time commitment: A few hours each week from June to October. Call Arthur Feinstein (510) 843-2222.

STATE OF THE ESTUARY CONFERENCE

There's a lot going on these days with the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary. The Delta smelt has just been listed as threatened, D-1630 has been put on hold, the newly formed B-DOC is in jeopardy and members of the San Francisco Estuary Project's Management Committee have just unanimously approved their Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). What better time to take a fresh look at the state of the Estuary.

The San Francisco Estuary Project in cooperation with the California Academy of Sciences will hold its second biennial State of the Estuary Conference on Saturday, June 5, 1993. The conference will be held at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Highlights of the conference include presentations from scientists Dr. J.R. Schubel, Dr. Sam Luoma and Dr. Josh Collins; Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (invited) and her San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary Act of 1993; a discussion of current state and federal policy related to water, wetlands and estuarine protection; the role of the media with the Chronicle's Elliot Diringer; the

premiere of "Teaming up for the Bay and Delta", a new short video demonstrating hands-on restoration efforts; key actions of the CCMP and implementation strategies; and the role of the citizen watchdog with Barry Nelson. Additional invited speakers, (to be confirmed) include Governor Pete Wilson and U.S. EPA Administrator Carol Browner.

Cost of the conference which includes lunch is \$20. For more information, please call the San Francisco Estuary Project at 510/464-7990.

CONTRA COSTA & ALAMEDA ALERT

A bill is pending in the state legislature that could force the East Bay Municipal Utility District to provide water to develop the Dougherty and Tassajara valleys in Contra Costa County. If **SB 1250** becomes law, 17 square miles of scenic ridgelines, rolling hills and viable wildlife habitat will be lost to urban development.

These losses are significant, and warrant public outcry. If assembly members from western Contra Costa and western Alameda counties (Barbara Lee, Tom Bates and Bob Campbell) testify against the bill when it is heard in assembly committee in early June there is a chance it will die in committee.

Senator Dan Boatwright, pro-development Contra Costan, has introduced the bill in an attempt to force the East Bay MUD to provide water to permit housing development in these two valleys—11,000 acres of open space. As amended April 14th, the bill would also force the Dublin San Ramon Services District or the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, sewer agencies that do not have the capacity for additional discharge, to provide service to the same location.

If SB 1250 becomes law:

- 17 square miles of scenic ridgelands, rolling hills and viable wildlife habitat in Contra Costa will be lost.

- East Bay MUD could be forced to divert fresh water flows in the Delta to meet its new obligations in Contra Costa.

- Water quality could drop for all East Bay MUD customers. The existing Sierra water supply for East Bay MUD is not sufficient to provide service to the existing service area plus Tassajara and Dougherty valleys. Customers in Contra Costa County are expected to use five times as much water per capita as people in western Alameda County. to serve both existing customers and the new areas designated for development in Contra Costa, East Bay MUD could have to pump water from the Delta, thereby reducing fresh water flows through the estuary.

- In times of drought, in-fill development in the East Bay MUD service area in Alameda and Contra Costa counties could be denied hook-up because the district has been forced to divert its remaining water supply for development in Tassajara and Dougherty valleys.

- Wastewater from Tassajara and Dougherty will be dumped into the Delta.

The best chance to stop SB 1250 is in committee. Ask your representatives to talk to their colleagues on the policy committee to kill the bill because of its adverse impact on the Greenbelt, the Delta, and the economic and social well-being of the cities in western Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Barbara Lee (510) 286-0339
Oakland, Alameda and Piedmont

Robert Campbell . (510) 372-7990
Rodeo, Crockett, Hercules, Martinez, Concord, Clayton, Pleasant Hill, Pacheco, Pittsburg and Antioch

Tom Bates (510) 428-1423
Oakland, Berkeley, Albany, Emeryville, El Cerrito, Richmond, Pinole, San Pablo

The mailing address is Capitol Bldg., Sacramento, CA 95814.

BACK YARD BIRDER

The tail is one good field mark for bird identification. Is it long or short? What shape is it? Is it rounded, squared, notched, short and pointed or wedge-shaped? Is it banded or plain? Does it have white outer feathers (coverts)?

The tail generally means the conspicuous feathers which are so very important to a bird's flight. When spread or "fanned" this extra surface helps birds such as hawks and eagles to soar by creating extra lift. When lowered, the tail acts as a brake. It becomes a rudder when it is twisted horizontally, allowing a bird to turn in flight. The tail also helps a bird to balance when it is perched. Woodpeckers, creepers and swifts use their stiff tail feathers to brace their bodies as they cling or climb vertically.

The "steering" or tail feathers are called *retrices*, a fan of pairs of closely overlapping feathers. The two central feathers are so close they appear as one. The number of retrices varies from 8 up to 32, with 12 being the most common in song birds.

It is interesting that the number of retrices is not consistent within families or even genera. The shape of the unit depends on the feathers' lengths and how they are arranged. A few species, such as tropicbirds, male Pintails and Oldsquaws, have very long central retrices which seem to be for display purposes rather than for aiding flight.

Tail length varies from rudimentary tails (grebes) to short and stubby (wrens) to long (Ring-necked Pheasant). A tail is considered long when it is

longer than the bird's body and short when it is shorter than the body length. There is a strong correlation between aerobatic ability and tail length. Some birds have such efficient tails (crows, ravens, Peregrine Falcons, e.g.) that they can fly upside down, loop-the-loop, make split-second stops and turns and even do backward somersaults! Their long tails utilize powerful muscle control for these tricky maneuvers. Birds with long, forked tails (terns, Barn Swallows, Swallow-tailed Kites and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers) are not only swift but execute graceful maneuvers, including hovering. While ALL versatile fliers have moderately long tails, not all birds with very long tails are aerial masters. Cuckoos, magpies, thrashers, wagtails and grackles all make little use in flight of their long tails.

The position of the tail when a bird is at rest—is it parallel or perpendicular to the ground?—creates a bird's posture. This is a good clue to identifying many birds. Wrens, dippers and other birds "cock" their tails when perching. Ruddy Ducks use their cocked tails as rudders underwater. Bushtits and their relatives flex their tails toward their bellies for stability as they hang from branches.

Tail movements are also a key to separating some difficult species, such as the *Empidonax* flycatchers have distinctive tail gestures. A slow raising and lowering of its tail is a common mannerism of the Hermit Thrush. For some inexplicable reason, many bobbing or wagging species frequent watery habitats (wagtails, pipits, Ovenbirds, dippers and many shorebirds).

Some of the most spectacular courtship displays involved tail cocking and/or fanning of the tail feathers (Wild Turkey, Ruffed and Sage Grouse and Killdeer, e.g.). Among songbirds only

the American and Painted Redstarts keep their boldly-pattered tails (and wings) spread while catching insects, scolding, courting or simply foraging. Some tails even produce sound, as in the courtship of the Common Snipe. A male snipe dives through the air with its tail feathers spread, producing a hollow, whistling sound which can be heard up to ½ miles away.

Obviously, birds' tails are vital in many aspects of birds' lives: flight, courtship, communication, and balance. Tails even help those of us who are merely observers.

—MEG PAULETICH

LETTERS

Berkeley

Dear "Back Yard Birder" and
The GULL,

As a long-time loon watcher, I found the April issue of *The GULL* indeed a treat. Such special attention for a bird seen locally usually only in its eclipse plumage and with its vocal pyrotechnics on hold is a tribute not only to the bird, but to the author. She appreciates this family for its unique appearance and life-style. Perhaps a few references to recent literature will give her comments a broader context.

Loons are indeed the first birds in field guides, because for many years they were considered the oldest lineage of birds. But modern methods of tracing relationships have found loons to be no older than a number of other bird families, so their place in the guides is more a matter of convention, not current biology. (However, as a loon fancier, I consider it their proper place, of course!) The recent studies on the ancestry of loons note that the 60 million year-old fossils of herperonis are similar in many ways to loons, as would be expected since they share the characteristics of foot-diving birds. But

this is considered an example of convergent evolution, rather than evidence of a line of descent. True loon fossils do date back to 30 million years ago and represent several species. (See Judith McIntyre, *The Common Loon*, 1988)

Four of the five species recognized today are observable here in large wintering rafts on the ocean or singly in bays and estuaries. The Common and the Yellow-billed loons may best be separated by the angle of the head and bill: the common loon bill is quite symmetrical and is held horizontal (except for an "alert" posture); the Yellow-billed appears to raise its head above horizontal. (See a PRBO issue devoted to distinguishing loons.) Like the "Back-Yard Birder", I have seen migrating Common Loons in their breeding-plumage, but I have heard only the alarm-call tremolo, and never had the luck to hear the high upsweeping yodel of the breeding-territorial male. Perhaps this spring I will have better luck.

Common loons in breeding season guard their territory fiercely and with great vocal and physical displays. But their courtship is very discreet and quiet (as suits a species that mates for life and return year after year to the same site) with bill-averted circling and head-dipping. The flamboyant "vulture position" and racing on the water upright with wings beating is reserved for intruders, whether other loons, predators, or (in)advertent humans. The next varies with the site: if there is near-by vegetation in land or water, the nest can be quite large and elaborate; if the best site is a muddy bank, then a scrape in the ground suffices for both birds to incubate the large eggs for nearly a month. The precocious young leave the nest as soon as they dry, and do not return. The bouyant young lose much body heat through their very large feet and profit by back-riding part of the time

for two or three weeks. Their parents, who are primarily fish eaters, provide an opportunistic diet of fish and invertebrates to the young for eight weeks at least.

A decline in population of all loon species is likely, given the toll of gill netting on Canadian lakes and in the oceans, the role of toxics, and the encroachment of people on lake breeding habitat. This is particularly true for the Common Loon, which has the greatest human interface because they breed farthest south, that is, through much of Canada and the northern tier of our states.

The North American Loon Fund serves as a clearing house for several organizations which have sprung up in the last 25 years dedicated to preserving loons, sponsors research on loon biology and management projects. On the basis of data from many areas, the NALF has reported for several years that loons and people can co-exist on lakes, if people come to know the needs of the loons and will accommodate to them. In this area, public education since the 1970's has been very successful: declining loon populations on many lakes shared with people have recovered, and have indeed increased. For this single-species conservation effort, there seems to be reason for hope.

Thank you for featuring the Loon in this issue of *The GULL*.

ELLEN BARTH

ANOTHER LETTER

San Francisco

Editor,

I must tell you something, even as you sit there in your dark and dreary office working on the next issue of *The GULL*, for a rare and wonderful thing has happened to me and it cannot be kept a secret. A pair of Fox Sparrows has taken up winter residence in Collingwood Gardens and I enjoy their

presence greatly. The sight of them feeding near the lime tree and in the damp grass near the base of the boxwood never fails to brighten my day as I pause to watch. They are not timid, but they stay near cover and they do not let me know where they pass the greater part of their free time.

Last fall I determined that the Fox Sparrow was the bird that had the loudest fuss notes of all the birds. I could hear them fussing long before they came out into the open. I took the sounds to be alarm notes or sounds made while checking out the dangers of venturing out beyond the shelter of the shrubbery. Although I attributed the noise to the Fox Sparrow, I seldom saw one making the noise.

Harriet Williams Myers discussed Fox Sparrows in the 1920's in her book *Western Birds*, and she had this to say about their song: "In musical ability, the Towhee must take a back seat as this big red sparrow, though having a feeble *tseep* note, is a marvelous songster. The notes are full, rich and somewhat plaintive, but bubble forthwith spontaneous abandon, and when heard from many throats at the sunset hour, it is a never-to-be-forgotten chorus." I never harbored any hopes of ever hearing the Fox at song, but this morning as I stood on the stone steps leading to the bottom of the lower garden I heard the loud fuss notes coming from the tallish tree that grows beside the garden gate. I stood still and looked up and quietly waited. The bird soon appeared, fussing in full view.

Definite proof that the fuss notes are from the resident Fox. It apparently was unaware of my presence because it soon began to sing as it moved farther out into the open. The song is lovely, reminding me of a mimic bird... a thrush or mockingbird, but without the full throaty volume of the mockingbird. It sat calmly and sang for several

minutes while I stood silently below. Finally it seemed to notice me and flew off downhill over the Leaper's newly installed garden. I felt like I had been touched by the wing of an angel or had been given a strong hug by Bill Clinton. Ain't life grand?

Have you ever heard the Fox Sparrow's song?

—CECIL W. BLANK

EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

Oakland

Don Sanford,

This is my first time as a member of the Audubon Society. I just received your newsletter, *The GULL*.

I am very concerned about racism and sexism in the newsletter. I will not be able to continue my membership if this is an indication of your usual level of sensitivity.

On p. 81, col. 1, last paragraph: "Flesh-footed"—please explain the term. If this is in reference to a color, which it appears to be, exactly whose flesh are we talking about? And who is being marginalized by skin-color here?

On p. 84, col. 2, paragraph 3: "write your State Senator and Assemblyman." There are women in the Assembly too. "Assemblyman" is a sexist term. Please stop using it.

—CHRISTINE SAULNIER

Berkeley

Dear Christine Saulnier,

Welcome to the Golden Gate Audubon Society. Especially, welcome, because you care and you write letters. I hope you will write to your Senators, your Representative in Congress, and State Assemblyman or Assemblywoman, when the issues prompt you to do so. Audubon needs people like you, so do not give up on us with the first issue of *The GULL*.

I am reminded of a cartoon in the *NEW YORKER* many years ago.

Queued at a pharmacist's counter were an Asian, a Black, a Hispanic, a Native American, a North European, an Arab in a fez, an Indian in a turban, an Australian Aborigine, a native of the Chilean Andes, and a Gypsy, all responding to a placard that announced a special offering of "flesh-colored bandaids."

Apparently in the case of the Flesh-footed Shearwater, the American Ornithologist's Union, which is the arbiter of terminology, felt this was an improvement over the earlier name of Pale-footed Shearwater, leading one to believe that the committee was made up of people from Northern Europe. In any case, it is to them that this issue should be addressed, perhaps with the suggestion that the earlier name was to be preferred.

With respect to members of the State Assembly we were presumptuous in not including "or Assemblywoman." However, as it applies to those males who are members, Assemblyman seems appropriate enough.

Thanks for caring.

DON SANFORD



SIERRA FIELD RECORDING WORKSHOP

The Nature Sounds Society, an organization dedicated to the recording of natural sounds and the preservation of quiet places, will hold its ninth annual Field Recording Workshop June 18 through 20 at the San Francisco State University Field Station at Yuba Pass in the Sierra Nevada. The weekend event, with a theme of "Wilderness

Values," is co-sponsored by the Oakland Museum and features workshops, hands-on demonstrations and field recording opportunities for both beginning and experienced nature sound enthusiasts and recordists.

To register, call the Oakland Museum Natural Sciences Dept. (510) 238-3884, ext. 111. Space is limited and early registration is advised.

Guest instructors this year will include Doug Quin, Ruth Happel and Dan Dugan. Composer, recordist and visual artist Quin has done extensive digital field recording of nature sounds as well as multimedia slide/sound projects. Happel is a sound recordist/biologist who has developed multimedia and audio projects to encourage wildlife awareness. She is particularly concerned with vanishing habitat. Both Quin and Happel have recorded throughout the world's rain forests. Electronics inventor, theater sound designer Dugan, the Northern California service specialist for Nagra tape recorders, will answer technical and equipment questions.

The cost of \$135 for Nature Sounds Society members, \$150 for non-members, includes food, lodging, and workshop events. Transportation to and from the Field Station is not included.

For more information, call Catherine Girardeau, 415/821-4264, or Paul Matzner, 510/238-3884.

BLACK BIRD, SING!

A musical theater collaboration about why migratory song birds are currently dying throughout North and Latin America is scheduled in downtown Bolinas at the Bolinas Community Center Friday and Saturday, June 4 and 5 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, June 6 at 2 p.m. The Sunday performance is billed as "special for the Marin Community Foundation, the Audubon Society and Bird Lovers."

Described as "a contemporized Raven Myth," written by Claire Blotter, it is directed by Ms. Blotter, with assistance from Kris Gannon, former Artistic Director of Theater Rhinoceros. Carol Negro, director of the Marin Community Chorus has written and will perform original music with her ensemble. Seven species of Marin birds will be portrayed by children and adults with aerial/trapeze ballet choreographed by Susan Murphy and African Caribbean Dance by Willifred Marks. Authentic bird headresses are designed by sculptor Joyce Connors. It sounds interesting, if you can find your way to downtown Bolinas.

BIRD SEED, FEEDERS, ETC.

You missed the sale! Never despair, we continue to stock seed. Call (510) 843-2222 just to be sure we are here, and then come to buy what you need. We have black oil sunflower seed, our own Audubon mix, millet, niger (thistle) seed, etc.

NEWS FROM OUR RANCH

Audubon Canyon Ranch (415) 868-9244
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A FEW PERSONAL NOTES ON THE RANCH

Kevin, my 10-year old son, visited

the Ranch with his 4th grade class recently. He discovered all kinds of great things. Can you believe they found a mountain lion scat on the trail? The newts in the ponds and the horse trough were the most popular critters, closely followed by the baby herons and egrets and the blue eggs in the nests. One of the moms who came as a chaperone was astonished how much she learned from the docent and how much she enjoyed her introduction to nature study. In the Phillipines she had gathered food and other necessities in natural areas, but her day at ACR gave her an entirely new perspective on nature. She's coming back to share the Ranch with her whole family.

The next day Joan and I scouted for an upcoming field trip to the Ranch. The buckeyes were just coming into bloom. Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Orange-crowned Warblers, Wilson's Warblers and Purple Finches seemed to be singing everywhere. Parson's Pond was just bursting with life. A swallowtail sucked moisture from the ponds edge. A Song Sparrow reminded me even these vegetarians supplement their diet with meat during the nesting season when it flew out from its nest in a nearby coyote bush and snatched a blue skimmer for its insatiably hungry young. Just up the canyon at the water trough we found a Chestnut-backed Chickadee nest in a dead branch of the buckeye. We stopped at the overlook after enjoying a few lingering wildflowers including quite a few coral

— CONTRIBUTORS —

GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY THANKS THE GENEROUS DONORS who responded to our January letter. Funds continue to come in. The funds received will be judiciously expended to advance the efforts indicated in the letter.

Alexander & Baldwin
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roots. It was pretty dry, but we did find a few banana slugs. A Pileated Woodpecker called from the woods near the wood rat nest. WOW! I never did see it, but knowing it's there made this a memorable day.

Well, now you know how the Murphys enjoyed the Ranch recently. Why not pack a picnic basket, head west for ACR and enjoy it for yourself? You only have until July 18. Then the Ranch closes until next year. If you have a fourth or fifth grader next fall or spring tell their teacher about ACR—it's a great field trip.

SPRING CALENDAR NOTES

Check your April newlsetter for full details about our remaining spring seminars. All seminars require advanced reservatons. Please call Edris at (415) 868-9244.

"ACR's Ponds—with the Researchers" at the Bolinas Lagoon Preserve on June 4 & 5 with Ray Peterson and Tom Bradner (\$20).

"Butterfly Counts" in Marin County on June 26, in Sonoma County on June 27, and get-to-know-the-critters night on June 23 with Ray Peterson (\$5).

"Local Ecology and Natural History" at Bolinas, Cypress Grove and Bouverie Sanctuaries during the week of July 19–23 with John Kelly, John Petersen and Ray Peterson (\$195). This is the widely acclaimed annual program for teachers which will help you make natural history an integral part of your science program. The fee includes 3 semester units.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY: TOMALES BAY SHOREBIRD COUNTS

It's not too early to call John Kelly so you can join our fall shorebird counts in August and September. John will even give you counting lessons. You'll be able to call yourself a real bean counter when you're through with this exercise. You'll probably be a bit more humble too, but it's fun and for a good cause. If you have a fair knowledge of shorebirds we hope you will join us in continuing this important research project. Call John Kelly at Cypress Grove Preserve for information (415) 663-8203.

—DAN MURPHY

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